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“Enterprises and Incitements”: The Berlin Indian Independence Committee in the files of the Political Archives of the Federal Foreign Office (1914 - 1920)

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"Undertakings and Incitements": The Berlin Indian Independence Committee in the files of the Political Archives of the Federal Foreign Office (1914-1920)

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Creation of an archive collection

Supporting anti-colonial forces on a global scale was an important element of German foreign policy during the First World War. In addition to propaganda at various levels, it also included financial and military-logistical assistance. This policy aimed to harness and strengthen anti-colonial sentiments, ultimately supporting unrest and uprisings against the wartime enemies England, France, and Russia: In short, it was about the "incitement" and "revolutionization" of enemy territories.

In the Intelligence Agency for the Orient (NfO), specially created at the Federal Foreign Office, the orientalist, archaeologist, and diplomat Max Freiherr von Oppenheim (1860-1946) initially developed a special strategy for "incitement" in Muslim territories, which was soon expanded to include other colonies and territories under British, French, or Russian rule. The historian Fritz Fischer later referred to this foreign policy propaganda strategy as a "revolutionary program" and demonstrated how "revolutionization" was used by the German side as a means of waging war.

> The war aim of breaking up the British and Russian empires was intertwined with the means of revolution. France and England appeared most vulnerable in their black colonial populations, while Russia offered a starting point for insurrection in its foreign nationalities (Fischer 1984: 109).

The Political Archives of the Federal Foreign Office in Berlin (PA AA) contain extensive, country- and region-specific files on the First World War, entitled "Operations and Incitements against our Enemies." These documents document in detail the German side's efforts to support revolutionary and nationalist forces with an anti-colonial or anti-imperial thrust. Their goals, directed against the British, French, and Russian colonial powers, were well-suited to the military and political goals of German foreign policy. The strategy was global in nature and also included neutral countries, as the documents in the Federal Foreign Office archive demonstrate. Under the heading "Operations and Incitements against our Enemies," the *World War 11* (WK 11) collection contains files on support for anti-Russian efforts in Ukraine.

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(WW11a); in Poland (WW11b); “in Russia, especially in Finland” (WW11c) or in the Caucasus (WW11d); to support anti-colonial movements in Afghanistan and Persia (WW11e); in “Egypt, Syria and Arabia” (WW11g); Canada (WW11i); “among the Boers” (WW11j); “among the Irish” (WW11k); “in the African possessions of France” /WW11l); “in Siberia” (WW11m); in Romania (WW11n); in Bulgaria (WW11o); in Italy (WW11p); in Spain (WW11q); “in Abyssinia” (WW11r); in Portugal (WW11v) and in India (WW11f).

The Foreign Office and the Intelligence Agency for the Orient organized these propaganda, military, logistical, and financial "ventures" not alone, but jointly with internationally active networks of anti-colonial and anti-imperial orientations. Corresponding groups in Berlin played an important role. These groups, in turn, were interested from exile in weakening the colonial powers and, in connection with this, often in a purposeful cooperation with Germany. For this purpose, the Foreign Office, the NfO, and Department IIIb of the Deputy General Staff of the Army under Rudolf Nadolny (1873-

1953) identified potential cooperation partners and utilized existing organizational structures and networks of anti-colonial groups in Europe and North America. They supported the formation of independence committees that were monitored and controlled by the German side, but which, in turn, attempted to evade this monitoring and control and pursued their own political strategies.

The files contained in the PA AA under the title "Operations and Incitements Against Our Enemies. India" provide information on the origins, composition, and activities of the Indian Independence Committee *(IIC), founded in Berlin in September 1914,* its collaboration with the Federal Foreign Office, and the international networks associated with it. Compared to the other countries, India has the most comprehensive collection of documents on the topic of "incitement" in the PA AA. The files on India within the WK 11 holdings begin with Volume 1 in August 1914, with the signature R 21070; the last file in Volume 48, with the signature R 21118, ends in April 1920. In addition, there are four accompanying files with personal information for the same period (R 21119 to R 21122).

India in German foreign policy during the World War

As the largest colony of the British Empire, India played a special role in the strategic planning of the German Foreign Office. The German starting point was the consideration that unrest in India would significantly weaken the British Empire. Corresponding assessments of the situation were obtained from various sources. In analyses requested by the office upon the outbreak of war, German and Indian experts commented on the situation in India and took a position on the crucial question, from the German perspective, of whether uprisings and rebellions against the British could be expected there in the near future, and which forces should be supported in this context. The German Arabist and Islamic scholar Josef Horovitz (1874-1931), who had previously taught for several years at the *Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College* in Aligarh , elaborated on the special role of Indian Muslims in a memorandum. He was of the opinion:

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> […] that the Mohammedans represent the more masculine element in North India and that it is very important to influence this segment of the population in order to provoke renewed trouble in the northern part of India, particularly in connection with the pan-Islamic idea and affiliation with the Caliphate of the Ottoman Sultanate.1

The views of Indian political activists outside the subcontinent were also sought. For example, Chempakaraman Pillai (1891-1934), who had previously founded and led the International Committee *Pro India* in Zurich and who had come to Berlin from Switzerland in September 1914, declared that an uprising in India was imminent.2 Har Dayal (1884-1957), co-founder of the *Ghadar* (German: Revolution) movement in North America and by then already in Europe, was also convinced that a revolution in India was imminent.3 Both Har Dayal and Pillai

became active members of the IIC. It was the first of several independence committees of foreign groups in exile in Berlin. It was followed by committees of Persian, Egyptian, Georgian, and Irish nationalists, among others (Bihl, 1975). These committees were formed with the support of the Foreign Office, particularly the National Association of German Nationalists (NfO). However, in their practical cooperation with the German authorities, they increasingly evaded German control over the course of the war and pursued different nationalist goals.

During the First World War, Berlin became a significant center of political activity among Indian nationalists and revolutionaries. Indians residing in Germany or Europe in the summer of 1914 associated the outbreak of war with the expectation of receiving active German support in their anti-colonial struggle. The German authorities, for their part, linked this cooperation with the hope of strengthening anti-British forces and expanding their own positions during the war and beyond. This corresponded to the dominant German military and foreign policy strategy, which Fritz Fischer characterized as a "program for revolutionizing." From Fischer's perspective, revolution was indeed a war aim, aimed at supporting anti-colonial forces and thus weakening the European colonial powers, i.e., Germany's wartime enemies (Fischer, 1984; Jenkins, 2013). One means of implementing this objective was the "incitement" of anti-colonial populations on a global scale. It included support for Flemish, Irish, and Persian nationalists as well as cooperation with Georgian, Egyptian, and Indian anti-colonial political forces. The German "Jihad Strategy," initially developed by Max von Oppenheim and intensively discussed in the international academic world (Loth, 2014; Lüdke,

Fig. 1: Max Freiherr von Oppenheim. Source: https:// secure.i .telegraph.co.uk/ multimedia/ archive/ 03001/ Oppenheim_3001 312c.jpg

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2015; Zürcher, 2016), was accordingly merely one, albeit central, component of far more comprehensive imperial foreign policy efforts.

The Indian Independence Committee: Goals and Networks

A look at the founding process of the Indian Independence Committee makes it clear that the organizers were able to draw on existing resources. Already existing translocal political networks and structures were partially relocated to Berlin and reorganized. Other locations that had previously played a central role in political work, such as London or Paris, had become too dangerous for anti-colonial activities (not only Indian ones) by the outbreak of the war. With the help of the NfO, the Berlin India Committee established contacts with the Ghadar Movement, which had emerged in California in 1913, and with existing European networks of Indian revolutionaries in London, Bern, Geneva, and Zurich, in order to recruit members for the newly founded committee. Chempakaraman Pillai, who headed the *Pro India Committee* in Switzerland,

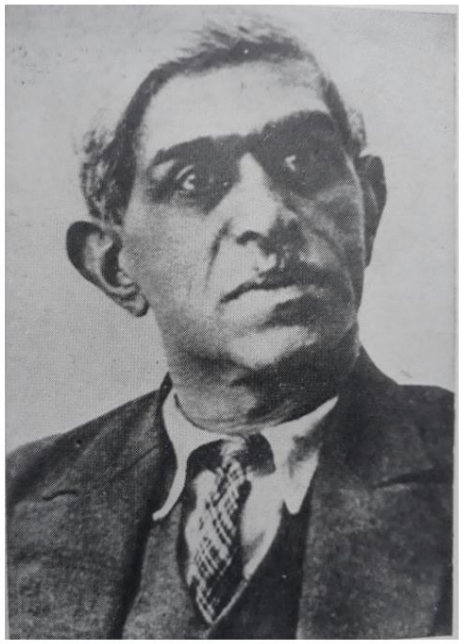

Fig. 2 Virendranath Chattopadyaya. Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/6b/Biren_Chattopadhyaya.jpg

and there also published the newspaper *Pro India*, had issued, Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, the
He had begun his studies in Germany in 1914, as well as Har Dayal, who co-founded the Ghadar movement, and others facilitated further contacts. Over time, more than 50 names were associated with the IIC, including Abhinash Chandra Bhattacharya, Tarachand Roy, Mansur Ahmad, Maulavi Barkatullah, Taraknath Das, Birendranath Dasgupta, Bupendra Nath Dutta, and the brothers Abdel Jabbar Kheiri and Abdel Sattar Kheiri, who primarily operated in Istanbul (Manjapra, 2014; Fischer-Tiné, 2015; Liebau, 2011a, 2014a; Oesterheld, 2004).

The IIC's main tasks, at least during the first half of the war, reflected both the interests of anti-colonial activists and the expectations and goals of the German Foreign Office. Among the defined objectives was to organize a mission to Afghanistan to request the Emir's permission to invade India from Afghan territory with an armed Indian battalion. Members of the IIC were involved in the famous Afghanistan Mission, led by Werner Otto von Hentig (1886-1984) in 1915. Furthermore, a mission to the Persian Gulf was to be conducted to convince Indian soldiers there not to fight against Turkish troops. Propaganda among Indian prisoners of war in Mesopotamia was to be used to recruit volunteers for an Indian Legion. Anti-British propaganda was to be organized among South Asian prisoners of war in Germany with the aim of recruiting prisoners to fight in the Turkish army. Members of the Berlin Independence Committee were involved in the production of the propaganda camp newspaper “Hindostan” in Hindi and Urdu, which was published in the Halbmondlager in Wünsdorf, a camp specially built for Muslims.

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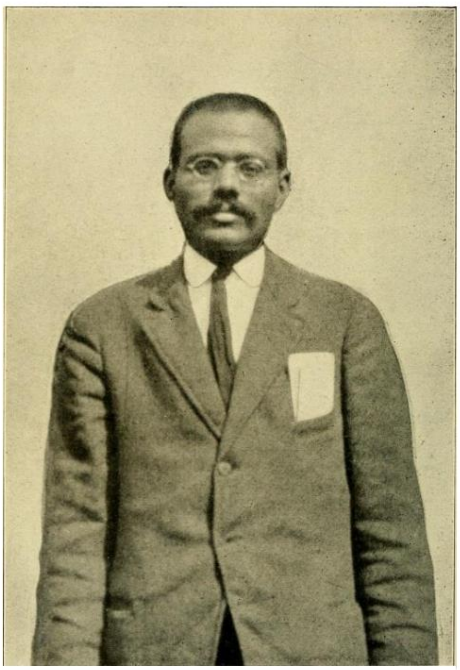
was distributed (Oesterheld, 2004; Liebau 2011a/b; 2014a/b; Lager, Jenkins/Liebau/Schmid, forthcoming).



Har_Dayal#/ me

ia;_an_interpretation_and_a_history_o

The Turkish side and the group of Indian nationalists operating in Istanbul played a decisive role in the IIC's position. Shortly after the committee was founded in Berlin, a similar committee was also installed in Istanbul. Members sometimes moved between locations. Disputes over positions, hierarchies, and strategies, as well as religious differences, were commonplace. Differing assessments of the political situation in Europe and India, as well as differing alliances, led to further tensions. The German Foreign Office and the Turkish secret service, *Tashkilat-e Mahsusa ,* were pulling their strings in the background. As the war progressed, it became apparent that the plans to revolutionize India and German jihad propaganda as a whole were not achieving the desired success. The Fig . *3 Lala Har Dayal. Source: https:/* aspirations of German imperialism, anti-colonial */en.wikipedia.org/ wiki/* To instrumentalize liberation movements, *dia/ File:Hardayal_from_%22Young_Ind* failed. The committees recognized that the *f_the_nationalist_movement_from_wit* German support did not meet the expectations *%22_(1916)_(14781991012).jpg*

The IIC responded by looking for new locations in Switzerland, the Netherlands, or Sweden. In 1917, Virendranath Chattopadhyaya opened a new office in Stockholm, which was called *Indiska Nationalkommittéen*

and engaged in disputes with the remaining part of the IIC in Berlin over who was legitimate to represent Indian nationalists in Europe (Barooah, 2004). 4

The history of the Berlin Indian Independence Committee not only provides insights into Indian anti-colonial movements outside the South Asian subcontinent and into German foreign policy strategies during the First World War. Members of the committee later found their calling in various ideological, religious, or political contexts. Recent research, which places greater emphasis on the perspectives of the various independence committees, examines the connections between these committees beyond German strategic intentions (Jenkins, Liebau, Schmid, forthcoming). To systematically trace these histories, the analysis of additional archival holdings of different national and political provenances, in India, England, Turkey, Sweden, or Russia, is required.

The concept for the German incitement strategy can be traced back to a memorandum prepared by Max von Oppenheim, the “Memorandum Concerning the Revolutionization of the Islamic Territories of Our Enemies” (1914) (von Oppenheim, 2018).
Shortly after the outbreak of war, von Oppenheim had already informed the Foreign Office of the need for intensive propaganda campaigns, financial and military support

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support for inciting anti-colonial forces and suggested the establishment of a specially dedicated institution, the "News Office for the Orient." What at first glance appeared to be a translation and information office was an institution of far-reaching propaganda and intelligence significance.

Fig. 4 Chempakaraman Pillai. Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chempakaraman_Pillai#/media/File:Champakraman_Pillai.jpg

Here, propaganda strategies were developed at various levels: in the colonies and dependent territories, among colonial soldiers at the front and in prison camps, and in neutral countries. Corresponding materials were developed, printed, and distributed in various languages.

NfO staff included both Germans (including diplomats, scientists, missionaries, and businessmen) and representatives of the various colonial and dependent regions. In addition to the Intelligence Office for the Orient, Section IIIb of the Political Department of the Deputy General Staff, under Rudolf Nadolny, was responsible for decisions and strategies in the field of propaganda. All activities were thus carried out with the approval and under the supervision of the Foreign Office and the Supreme Army Command.

"Operations and Incitements in the Territories of Our Enemies. India" and other relevant file collections in the PA AA

The files of the 48-volume sub-collection WK 11f "Operations and Incitements in the Territories of Our Enemies. India" belong to the R-collection of the Political Archives of the Federal Foreign Office, which includes documents from the period up to 1945. They contain documents from the period from August 1914 to April 1920 that reflect German foreign policy efforts to promote anti-colonial developments in and related to India, the largest British colony. The documents include correspondence, reports and assessments, newspaper clippings, propaganda materials, and administrative records. Taken as a whole, they provide an overview of the work of the IIC and the political activists associated with the committee, their attitudes, intentions, and conflicts—seen and filtered through the control and perspective of the German side.

Inquiries During the first months of the war, the documents cover inquiries into Indians who would be willing to cooperate with the German side. The Foreign Office obtained information from Indians living in Germany, as well as from diplomats from various countries, such as Switzerland. Indians, such as Chempakaraman Pillai, living in Zurich, and Abhinash Bhattachariya, studying in Halle, sought contact with German authorities and explored opportunities for cooperation. They provided further contact recommendations and assessments of political activists who might be considered for committee work. These assessments

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These could be recommendations or contain warnings. On the other hand, there were several situation reports on India in the first few months. The central question was how the author assessed the political situation and did he see the forces and opportunities for anti-British uprisings in the country. The authors of these situation reports were German businessmen, missionaries, or scientists, as well as Indians seeking cooperation with the German side. In September 1914, Max von Oppenheim reported on the founding of "his" Indian Committee in Berlin.5

Correspondence The
files also contain extensive correspondence between the Foreign Office in Berlin and various German missions abroad, primarily in Turkey, as well as correspondence between the IIC and the Foreign Office, individual Indian officials, and the Foreign Office. This correspondence concerned organizational and personnel work, primarily in the area of propaganda and related to the various political-military missions in which representatives of the IIC were involved. In connection with the preparation and implementation of these activities, the files contain numerous documents on lengthy administrative and decision-making processes. These concerned the logistics of the procedure, as well as financial and personnel considerations, which were exchanged between the Foreign Office, Department IIIb of the Army General Staff, and various branches such as embassies, legations, and consulates.

Reports
Another category includes situation reports, work reports, reports on the observation of individuals, and memoranda. The files contain, for example, several detailed reports on the work of the Indian Committee in Istanbul, the so-called Baghdad Mission, and the unsuccessful efforts to form an Indian Legion in Mesopotamia. From 1917 onward, reports from the Stockholm branch of the Committee, headed by Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, were added. These reports, written by representatives of the Indian Committee, were commented on by the relevant German authorities and provided with instructions for action. Individual Indians were observed by the German side on behalf of the German Foreign Office. For example, Helmuth von Glasenapp researched the Zurich-based revolutionary and scholar Shyamji Krishnavarma (1857-1930) and provided reports on the lectures given by Chempakaraman Pillai in German cities. The German Foreign Office created separate files for individual individuals, such as Chattopadhyaya. These are contained in the aforementioned accompanying files “Personalia” (R 21119-R 21122).

Further files
Not only the India-related files in the WK 11 "Operations and Incitements" collection provide information on the work of the Berlin IIC. References can be found in the files on other countries, especially Persia (WK 11e), Egypt (WK 11g), and Ireland (WK 11k). The IIC collaborated with representatives of these independence committees in various areas. Information on the IIC's propaganda work among Indian prisoners of war in Germany can be found under the file number WK 11s "Operations and Incitements against our Enemies – Activities in the Prison Camps of Germany." These files begin with the signature R 21244 in October

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1914 and end with R 21262 in December 1919. The special activities of individual members of the IIC for the News Agency for the Orient, including their collaboration in publishing the camp newspaper *Hindostan* in Hindi and Urdu, are reflected in the NfO files.
Under the file number Deutschland 126 adh.1, the 27 volumes begin with the signature R 1510 in January 1915 and end with R 1536 in December 1919.

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Endnotes

1PA AA, R 21080, by Oppenheim in a letter accompanying a memorandum by Josef Horovitz on the situation of Muslims in India, 11 March 1915.

2PA AA, R 21070, Telegram from the Imperial Ambassador to Switzerland, Baron von Romberg, to the Foreign Office, 8 September 1914.

3PA AA, R 21071, Telegram from Baron von Wangenheim to the Foreign Office, Constantinople, 13. September 1914.

4PA AA, R 21111, Report of the *Indiske Nationalkommittéen* in Stockholm to the *Indian Committee* Berlin-Charlottenburg, 17 January 1918.

5PA AA, R 21071, message from Max von Oppenheim to Otto Günther von Wesendonk, 11 September 1914.

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